Nominal Group

Nominal Group technique (NGT) is a structured variation of a small-group discussion to develop a set of priorities for action. NGT goes a step further than brainstorming. It gathers reflections from individuals on a specific topic which generates discussion to build shared understanding. A moderator guides the group through a structured approach to prioritisation of their ideas or suggestions. The process prevents the domination of the discussion by an individual, encourages all group members to participate, and results in a set of prioritised actions or recommendations that represents the groups preferences and provides context for final deliberation.

What is to be achieved?

Nominal Group Technique helps to uncover and explore a range views on an issue in a relatively short space of time (between 60 – 90 mins). The quiet time people are given to reflect on an issue and put their thoughts into writing leads to the generation of a high number of different ideas for consideration which leads to higher quality decisions. Rather than launching people into a discussion they have not had time to consider, this techniques sets time aside for quiet reflection before the discussion begins. This approach increases a groups sense of accomplishment and greater satisfaction with the quality of the groups output and efficiency. The round robin activity used as part of this technique fosters more equal participation and the ranking activity allows participants to democratically identify their priorities for decision making.

What is the format?

Nominal Group Technique uses a structured format lasting between 60 – 90 minutes to obtain multiple inputs from several people (around 5 – 9 people; or sub-groups can be organised to cater for larger numbers of participants) on a particular problem or issue. It is designed to promote the identification of key problems or in the development of solutions that can be tested further using more strategic deliberative processes.

Nominal Group

On–line use of the tool?

Examples of the use of Nominal Group technique on-line are limited. One example is the use of the technique for knowledge transfer which could provide support to other deliberative processes (Using Online Nominal Group Technique to Implement Knowledge Transfer).

What to consider?

Bringing all voices into the discusion

When conducting deliberative processes, consideration needs to be given to how to bring all the voices into discussion and this is where NGT is very useful

People process differently

Some people have the ability to think very quickly, however they may not always think deeply and the result can be limited in application; some people need time to process the information they are receiving and may be able to provide deeper insights as a result – NGT process allows time for thinking in silence to support the contributions people make to discussions

Some people have the ability to easily voice their concerns, some people have the ability to capture their views clearly in writing – NGT facilitates these abilities which increases the capacity of inclusive group participation

The spark

Some issues are so well entrenched that individuals "can't see the forest for the trees" – a spark of an idea or an insight from one group participant can stimulate creative and innovative thinking among other participants

Think new people, new ideas

There is wisdom in the crowds (Surowiecki, 2000) and you get to hear new ideas when you meet new people in a deliberative process

Structured approach

When there is heat or conflict in an issue, a structured approach like NGT allows participants to focus on a process that leads to clear democratically developed outcomes

Case Study – Primary Health Care Services

PwC Report – Primary Health Care Research

DOWNLOAD

 "What Primary Healthcare services should have the highest priority? "

Health service providers in South Australia were invited to share their perspective on the factors that would facilitate an effective primary healthcare service. Their perspectives where captured on notes as part of the NGT and then ranked. A report on the outcomes sessions held in Whyalla,

Pt Augusta, Pt Lincoln, Maitland, Murray Bridge, Mt Gambier, Naracoorte, Clare, Nuriootpa and Pt Pirie NGT throughout SA in Nov/Dec 2014 was prepared and used to inform population and health planning by regions across SA for the Country SA Medicare Local: Our region, our health, a comprehensive needs assessment for north and west South Australia, 2014.

Nominal Group

How to use the Nominal Group technique?

Before the session

- Prepare information on the topic for distribution to participants prior to the Nominal Group Technique session - examples are discussion papers, reports, draft plans, research papers, project scope or a copy of a previous group discussion

- Prepare a welcome statement that explains the purpose of the meeting, outlines individual roles and group norms; and describes how the output from the session will be used

During the session

1. Present a summary of information on the topic for discussion to prepare people for participation in the session

2. Give each participant sheets of A5 size paper (the large sticky note type is best) and a marker pen.

3. Outline the process to participants so they have a sense of what is going to happen and they don't jump ahead of the process:

STAGE

1	**Silent generation of ideas in writing**
2	**Round–robin recording of ideas**
3	**Discussion on ideas**
4	**Ranking of ideas**
5	**Tallying of ranking**
6	**Review of ranking**

Nominal Group

How to use the Nominal Group tool cont.

STAGE 1

Silent generation of ideas in writing

- Ask everyone to spend 5 minutes in quiet reflection on the topic and when they are ready, to write ideas or suggestions in brief phrases or statements on A5 sheets of paper (1 idea per sheet of paper) using marker pens so the writing is easy for everyone to see.
- Encourage everyone to work silently and independently. It may be necessary to remind people to give everyone in the room the next 5 minutes to work silently please.

STAGE 2

Round-Robin recording of ideas

- Take one idea from everyone to start off with in a round robin and post them on a sticky wall
- Let everyone know ideas can be added that have not been listed after a complete round of the group
- Let everyone know the ideas will be discussed once we have them up on the sticky wall – the task in stage 2 is to get the ideas posted
- If an idea is already on the list, ask people to share another one they may have to avoid duplication

STAGE 3

Discussion on ideas

- Allow 40 minutes to do this part of the work, i.e. enough time for people to talk, listen and understand what they are hearing
- Check in with the group when you think it is time to move on to hearing about another idea
- Look for opportunities to theme ideas or draw out areas of differentiation within a common theme such as communication versus public relations

STAGE 4

Ranking of ideas

- When the group is clear about the ideas, you can assign each idea on the sticky wall with a letter of the alphabet (a, b, c, etc)
- Hand out index cards to the participants - sticky notes are good for this (and now for the "cat herding"!!)

LIKE THIS ←

A   D

- Ask people to select what they think are the 5 most important ideas out of all the ideas on the sticky wall and write the letter of the 5 ideas they choose in the upper left hand corner of each card (see example)
- Demonstrate with a card so everyone is clear about what to do

LIKE THIS ←

A 5   D 1

- Next task is to look at their 5 cards and ask people to select the one they think is the most important out of the five ideas they have selected and write a 5 in the lower right hand corner – turn it over
- Next pick the card they think is the least important and write a 1 in the lower right hand corner - turn it over
- Next select the most important card among the three remaining cards and place a 4 in the lower right hand corner

Nominal Group

How to use the Nominal Group tool cont.

- Next select the most important card among the two remaining cards and write 3 in the lower right hand corner and then for the least important write 2 on the last card

*(**note:** it is more difficult for people to rank 5 ideas in one hit – going progressively for most important and then least important makes it easier to decide)*

STAGE 5

Tally of ranking

- Assign someone the role of transferring the scores to the tally sheet (see attached)
- While this is happening the moderator can check in with participants for feedback on the process

STAGE 6

Review of ranking

- Post the results of the ranking on the sticky wall using colorful 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th,
  and 5th cards.
- Participants may want to know further ranking numbers to see how close the ranking might have been
- Conduct a general review of the results. This does not include reversing the ranking order but it may involve discussion on for example, "what ideas that were ranked 6th and 7th because the voting was very close".

Close out the NGT by letting people know what will happen next with the results of the process.

After the session

- write up the notes in the themes identified by the participants
- write up the rankings
- summarise the information for use in action planning or for use in further decision making

Case Study – Youth Homelessness Strategic Group and Generic Homelessness Service Network

These alliances participated in an NGT process to determine their priorities for their action planning over the next 3 years. The priorities agreed upon during the process conducted throughout a morning session were used by the groups to develop their action plans during an afternoon session. This is a useful example of how valuable outcomes can be achieved within a short space of time using NGT.

https://www.lccare.org.au/outer-southern-generic-homelessness-service.html

Nominal Group

How to Evaluate?

- the Nominal Group Technique may itself be used as an evaluation tool with some modifications
- participants could be asked to rank their level of satisfaction with the process; what their thoughts were on the outcomes of the process – were the results close to what they expected? or, where the results unexpected?
- the value of the outcomes to support decision making could be assessed on a likert scale, i.e. (5-1)

Resource Required?

- facilitator trained in the use of the technique
- a meeting room large enough to comfortably seat a group or groups of participants at tables set out in a U-shape configuration with plenty of space in between tables if there is a large number of participants
- flip charts, masking tape, markers pens and A5 size sticky notes for each participant and either 3" x 5" index cards or small post-it notes
- Tally board or sheets to record ranking of ideas

Tips and helpful hints

Post it notes and marker pens	Have plenty of large and small post it notes and marker pens for participants to use
Dont post similar ideas	No need to post ideas on notes that are already on the wall to help manage the display of ideas – help the group to recognise ideas that are similar in context but may be worded slightly differently
Dont censor ideas	Facilitate discussion on ideas to gain clarification, not to dismiss ideas or resolve differences of opinions – there is no censoring of ideas in NGT
Sort ideas into themes	Engage participants in sorting the ideas into themes on the wall
Keep all ideas that make the wall	Keep all ideas (notes) visible on the wall – do not discount ideas that stand alone

Support References

http://www.mycoted.com/Nominal_Group_Technique